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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 000029

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STATE FOR NEA/FO - GRAY AND NEA/MAG
NSC FOR ABRAMS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KPAL](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE

REF: A. TUNIS 16

[1](#)B. 06 TUNIS 2973

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT F. GODEC FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During Ambassador's December 15 courtesy call on Minister of National Defense Kamel Morjane, Morjane highlighted the strong bilateral relations between Tunisia and the United States. Morjane noted the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on US goals in the region, but stressed that Tunisia supports a peaceful two-state solution. He praised the bilateral military relationship, while noting Tunisia is not willing to commit personnel to Afghan PRTs. Morjane said the GOT was concerned about its southern borders and asked for USG assistance in obtaining additional helicopters for border patrols. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Beginning with regional issues, Morjane told the Ambassador that the Arab-Israeli issue is a major obstacle to US policies and diplomacy in the region. However, Tunisians remain grateful to the United States for its role in World War II and its support for Tunisia's subsequent independence. Morjane added that President Ben Ali is "very much committed to peace in the Middle East," and the GOT believes there is "no other solution than two states side-by-side." The Ambassador responded that he is prepared to explain US policies, but stressed it is important that regional allies like Tunisia speak up to combat extremism and to encourage all Palestinians to accept the existence of Israel.

[1](#)3. (S) Turning to the bilateral military relationship, Morjane said that the Ministry "enjoys regular and confident relations" with its American counterparts. He expressed his gratitude for the support of the US military as well as the value of joint meetings, particularly on aviation issues. Morjane said he expects the "continuation of this confident and transparent relationship" and apologized for the "occasional delays in responding on some matters." He explained, "Consultation within the GOT can take some time."

[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador said that the United States would continue to offer programs and assistance and encouraged the GOT consider contributing in some way in Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan. Tunisia's reluctance to contribute to Afghan PRTs, said Morjane, is "not because we don't want Afghanistan to succeed". Rather, the security of Tunisia's citizens is tantamount, and sending Tunisians to such "dangerous" places is not an option. Morjane said his own opinion was that Afghans should come to Tunisia for training. The Ambassador emphasized that all countries have a responsibility to contribute to resolving the challenges in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan and expressed hope the GOT would continue to look for ways to do so.

[1](#)5. (C) In a response to Ambassador's offer of assistance,

Morjane said "We are working on our borders -- especially the southern part -- to reinforce our security." Morjane explained that Tunisia is reinforcing its presence and control through air and field operations. "Our brothers in Algeria are concerned about the northern borders, but we worry about what could come from the south," said Morjane. To support this effort, Morjane asked for assistance in obtaining the UH-1H helicopters of which Tunisia is awaiting the refurbishment. Specifically, Morjane asked if it would be possible to obtain two of the helicopters now, as "We have noticed a difference since we started using helicopters in this area." Ambassador responded that the United States appreciates Tunisia's strong stand on terrorism and that he would look into the helicopters issue.

16. (C) COMMENT: Morjane's concern over Tunisia's borders is noteworthy given recent security events (reftels). The Ministry of Defense is perennially under-funded and its material resources continue to show their age, limiting its ability to effectively control Tunisia's borders. Given the strength of the bilateral military relationship, the GOT need for military assistance, and shared counterterrorism goals, increased US financial support would be well received and applied. END COMMENT.

17. (C) BIO NOTE: Morjane was typically outgoing and friendly, noting that he and the Ambassador have a common interest in Africa and stressing his fondness for Nelson Mandela. In an unusual step for a senior GOT official, he encouraged the Ambassador to feel free to contact him anytime, including at the informal level. Morjane mentioned that he had a hobby of collecting old books and photos and later presented the Ambassador with a framed WWII-era photo of two US airmen with a Tunisian villager.

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